



CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES:

JERSEY'S LARGEST

Burlington County Has Always Had Room to Spare, Yielding Land to County-Makers, State Parks and Fort Dix; Today, Among Nation's Leaders in Agricultural Income, It's Also Playing Host to New Industries

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

Staff photos by Porter.

(This is the third of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Camden County.)

NATURE decreed from the start that Burlington County's personality would be split between the verdant brightness along the Delaware River banks and the piney gloom stretching eastward 10 miles inland from the river. The Quakers who first set foot in the colony learned that in 1677; it always has been a dominant factor in the county's growth.

More than 1,000 square miles were granted the first colonizers by the West Jersey Proprietors in 1676. Since then the county-makers have whacked away at Burlington's borders—cutting off a chunk to help make Hunterdon in 1713, slicing away another bit in 1838 to make room for Mercer, and, finally, chopping off a section on the Atlantic Ocean side in 1891 to add to Ocean County.

Nevertheless, Burlington remains New Jersey's largest county and one of its least settled. Through the years it has easily absorbed the vast schemes of iron makers, paper makers, charcoal burners and glass manufacturers. Three state parks (and parts of two others) have been cut from its pine vastness and Fort Dix has been accommodated without Burlington's even drawing a deep breath. Now there is talk of utilizing the tens of thousands

of acres in the tremendous Joseph Wharton estate down along the Mullica River to make either a state forest and water supply or an Army depot.

Burlington will adjust either way; adjustment has been its forte from the first.

ADJUSTMENTS were necessary, for example, for the hardy Quaker souls on the good ship Shield of Stockton who fastened their ship's rope to a giant sycamore on the banks of the Delaware in a gloomy December dusk in 1678. The ship's company walked ashore on the ice the next morning to join the Friends who had laid out the village in 1677 and quickly set about to live in caves or in rude lean-tos for the rest of the winter.

The village grew rapidly, and not the least of the changes was the shifting of the name from New Beverly to

Burlington. New settlers soon followed, attracted both by the lush land and by the liberties granted in the "Concessions and Agreements" of the West Jersey Proprietors. In 1681, after West Jersey became a separate province, the Colonial Assembly designated Burlington city as the West Jersey capital and official port of entry.

Settlers pushed outward. Thomas Farnsworth went eight miles up the Delaware in 1682 and founded Farnsworth's Landing (now Bordentown) on a breeze-swept bluff. Rancocas Creek was an invitation to the interior; Friends went up its placid waters soon after the establishment of Burlington and founded Bridgetown (now Mount Holly) on the flats beneath a holly-covered hill. Thomas Olive opened a grist mill on the Rancocas in 1678 and John Wills, son of Burlington's first physician, started a famous grist mill

on the same stream in the 1690s. Until Andrews's mill was opened at Tuckerton in 1704, men on horseback struggled all the way across state from Little Egg Harbor to Wills Mill. The cross-state visitors brought news of scattered bands of settlers working their way from the Atlantic Ocean up the Mullica, Wading and Bass rivers to sink their roots in Burlington's eastern edge.

QUICKLY it became established that Burlington County's destiny was linked with Philadelphia's. The county's harvests were welcomed by the city where brothers loved, and the county's future was cast in the straight line which linked New York and Philadelphia—and in the linking ran straight through the towns of Bordentown and Burlington.

True, New Jersey might be slated to be "like a barrel tapped on both ends," but Burlington County had no intention of being caught in the drainage.

Roads of a sort twisted across state, around the northern edge of the pine barrens, linking Burlington and Bordentown with Perth Amboy (capital of East Jersey). River packets to fill in the trip from Philadelphia to Burlington or Bordentown and from Perth



Burlington's Broad street, with railroad tracks bisecting thoroughfare. Old woodcut shows tree to which Quakers moored ship in 1678.



Farm scene near Mount Holly. County grows one-third of all sweet corn produced in the state, ranks first in blueberry and cranberry.



Amboy to New York soon appeared and by the 1730s boat-stagecoach trips were firmly established—although advertisements of their punctuality, their speed and their comfort often were far superior to the service, until 1771, when "Flying Machines" cut the trip to 36 hours.

REVOLUTIONARY wartime found Bordentown and Burlington on a sound basis and both cities had their share of gentlemen who argued that all this prosperity was due to the King. Some were vehement in their pro-Crown arguments. William Franklin, illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin and Governor of New Jersey, was forced from his aristocratic Green Bank estate in Burlington and lost his Royal governorship rather than agree with the patriots. Rev. Jonathan Odell, rector of Burlington's old St. Mary's Church, wrote fierce satires on America. Both chose to remain Tories and both ended their days in foreign countries.

Despite such defections, Burlington welcomed the Provincial Congress of New Jersey in 1776 and sent off to Philadelphia the delegates who signed for the state the Declaration of Independence. One of these was keen-

witted and sharp-tongued 38-year-old Francis Hopkinson of Bordentown.

Hopkinson predicted the Revolution in a 1774 essay, "A Prophecy," and later in life he designed the Great Seal of the United States and was instrumental in the design of the Stars and Stripes. Still, some of his lasting fame came for his merry jingle satirizing "The Battle of the Kegs."

The "kegs," filled with gunpowder, were launched with the ebbing tide on a January night in 1778. The hope was that the floating mines, vintage 1778, would strike British ships anchored at Philadelphia. Only one of the kegs exploded, killing four men, but it created panic in the fleet. Flint-happy Redcoats fired at everything floating in the river for days. Hopkinson's 22-verse tongue-in-cheek jingle extolled such "bravery."

DESPITE its strategic location, Burlington County suffered no major Revolutionary War battles, although foraging parties and minor skirmishes kept the county embroiled throughout the war. A band of 400 Hessians invaded Burlington city in December, 1776, and a punitive naval expedition was sent against Bordentown in May.

(Continued on Following Page)

Span across the Delaware links Burlington with Bristol, Pa. Area in left foreground is part of the Green Bank, a famous old promenade.



Pool (now empty) and rock gardens at Bonaparte Park, Bordentown, recalls 1816-1839 period when the exiled King of Spain resided there.

BURLINGTON COUNTY

(Continued from Preceding Page)

1778 (in retaliation, it is said, for Hopkinson's unappreciated poetry). The ships returning from Bordentown fired on Burlington, first taking the precaution to warn small boys off the bank!

Mount Holly was the scene of a clash when the iron works and other properties were destroyed and English soldiers slaughtered steer in the old Friends Meeting House in 1778. At Crosswicks a minor engagement ensued when Continental volunteers sought to destroy a bridge on June 23, 1778, to delay Hessian soldiers.

Thomas Paine, who fired Colonial imaginations and lagging patriotism with his "times that try men's souls" writings, found peace in Bordentown from 1783 until he traveled to Europe to become embroiled in the French Revolution. He wrote longingly of Bordentown while in France but when he returned he found few of his old friends cared to see the author of "The Age of Reason"—and he was literally run out of town by a mob of jeering pursuers.

ADJACENT houses in Burlington city welcomed famous-to-be sons in the 1780s, when James Lawrence was born at 459 High street in 1781 and J. Fenimore Cooper was born at 457 High in 1789. James Lawrence went into the Navy, won immortality for his plea, "Don't give up the ship!" as he lay dying after a sea battle with the British in the War of 1812. The Coopers moved away when J. Fenimore was a year old, but Burlington rightfully gains some glory from the great early American novelist.

War's end turned Burlington farmers back to the soil. One of them, Charles Newbold, decided something better than the crude tilling of the soil was imperative. He patented the nation's first cast iron plow in 1797, but overcame only with difficulty the prejudices of farmers—who feared Newbold's invention would poison the soil.

The county had grown so by 1796 that the county seat was moved to Mount Holly—a splendid choice. The new county seat had a deep heritage, even by 1796. It pointed with quiet pride to John Woolman, the intense Quaker who fought slavery and wrote brilliantly. It discussed with satisfaction the famed Indian missionary John Brainerd, who taught and preached in Mount Holly from 1767 to 1775 and spoke courageously against the British in 1776.

One of Brainerd's joys, incidentally, was the nation's first Indian reservation, established in Burlington County in 1758 at Edgepelick or Brotherton (now Indian Mills). Brainerd taught school there among the Indians he

loved before accepting a call to Mount Holly. Soon, however, the vanishing tribe of New Jersey red men found life in the reservation lonely and they departed the state forever in 1802 for greener pastures at Oneida, N. Y.

EASTWARD from Mount Holly the great pine lands stretched afar, covering two-thirds of the county and spreading far off into adjacent counties. Charles Reed penetrated the forest in 1766 to set up iron works on the Mullica River at Batsto, but it was Gen. Washington's good friend, Col. William Richards, who made the works productive during the Revolution. Elsewhere iron forges and furnaces prospered at 19th Century's dawn, combining the bog iron dug from the swamps with the seemingly unlimited charcoal timber to turn out quantities of iron pipe, firebacks, Dutch ovens and other iron goods. Burlington at one time had more than a dozen iron works within its borders.

Out along the Delaware, Bordentown had a burst of excitement in 1816 when Joseph Bonaparte, exiled King of Spain and brother of Napoleon, bought 1,500 acres of land at Point Breeze and developed an elaborate estate. A special act of the Legislature was required to sell him the land and the passage earned New Jersey the sobriquet of "New Spain." Joseph liked Bordentown so well that in 1824 he unhesitatingly turned down a commission from Mexico offering him the throne to stay in Bordentown, but eventually he returned to France in 1839. Joseph's nephew, tall, handsome Prince Napoleon Francois Lucien Charles Murat, caused local sighs of despair when he eloped with Caroline Fraser, the belle of Bordentown.

BORDENTOWN'S river quaintness changed forever in the 1830s. First, Isaac Dripps put together the "John Bull" in 1831 and prepared the locomotive for travel across state to South Amboy on the Camden & Amboy Railroad. In 1834 the Delaware & Raritan Canal was completed to link Bordentown and New Brunswick. The railroad established big shops in the city and the canal terminal required lodging places for somewhat ungenteel canal mule drivers and their mules. Many of the aristocrats didn't compromise; they moved out.

Culture continued vital to the county, nonetheless. The Quakers had established a school in Burlington as early as 1682 and a library had been started in that town in 1758 under charter from King George II. Burlington County's cultural pride also embraced Clara Barton, a quietly determined miss who reached Bordentown in 1851. Aroused by the lack of schooling for the poor, she established



Court House at Mount Holly, built in 1796, when county seat moved from Burlington. John Brainerd, Indian missionary, taught in town.



The West Jersey Proprietors, organized in 1676, still continue to meet in this Burlington building every April 13 to conduct business.

in a one-room building a free school, one of the first in America. When townspeople insisted that she be supervised by a male principal she resigned and went elsewhere to found the Red Cross.

NOT exactly cultured, but certainly fascinating, was another Burlington character, Hezekiah B. Smith, who arrived from New England in 1865 to convert an abandoned thread mill on Rancocas Creek into a thriving machine manufacturing center. Modestly he renamed the surrounding village Smithville.

Smith, simple and proud of his humble beginnings, affected a Quaker hat and shawl. Nevertheless he lived the life of an industrial prince, maintaining a gambling casino in town and a well-filled liquor cellar. Smith manufactured the high-wheeled Star bicycle, among other things; took out more than 40 patents and was at times fooling with models of flying machines and steam wagons.

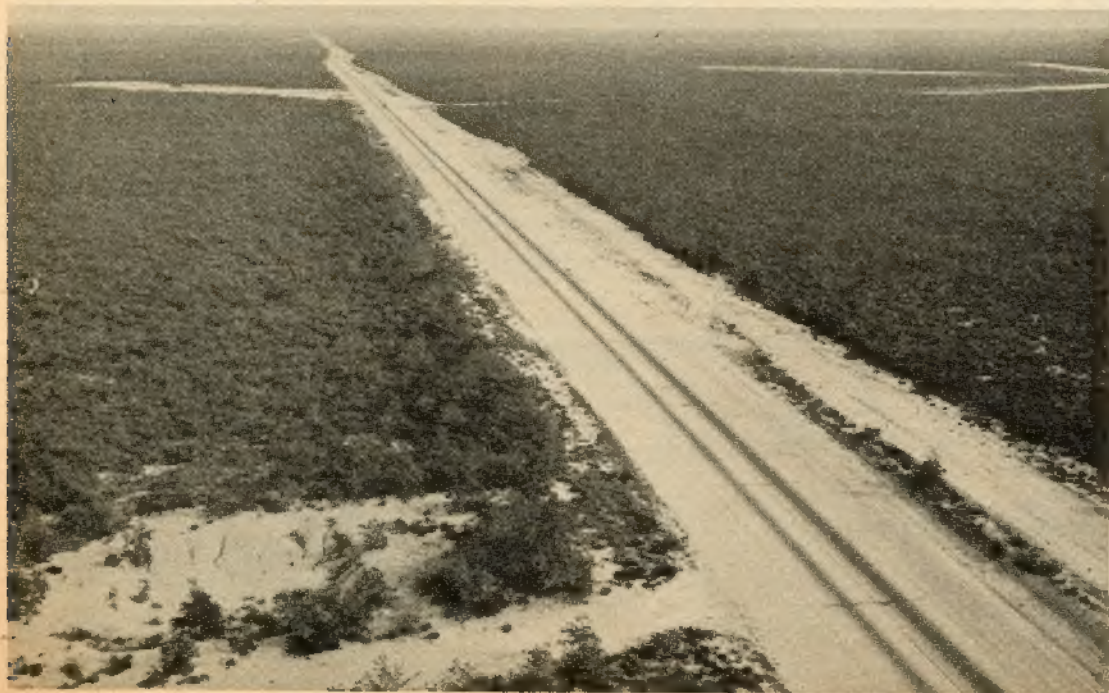
Hezekiah created talk with the trained bull moose he imported to pull his carriage when he campaigned for Congress and with his Smithville Brass Band. Smithville mourned with Hezekiah in 1881 when his young "wife" died. His death in 1887 brought

Smithville up short, however, because at will-reading time his true wife and five children suddenly appeared from Woodstock, Vt., where Hezekiah had deserted them. Thus, Smithville learned for the first time that Hezekiah, for all his glittering, was not pure gold.

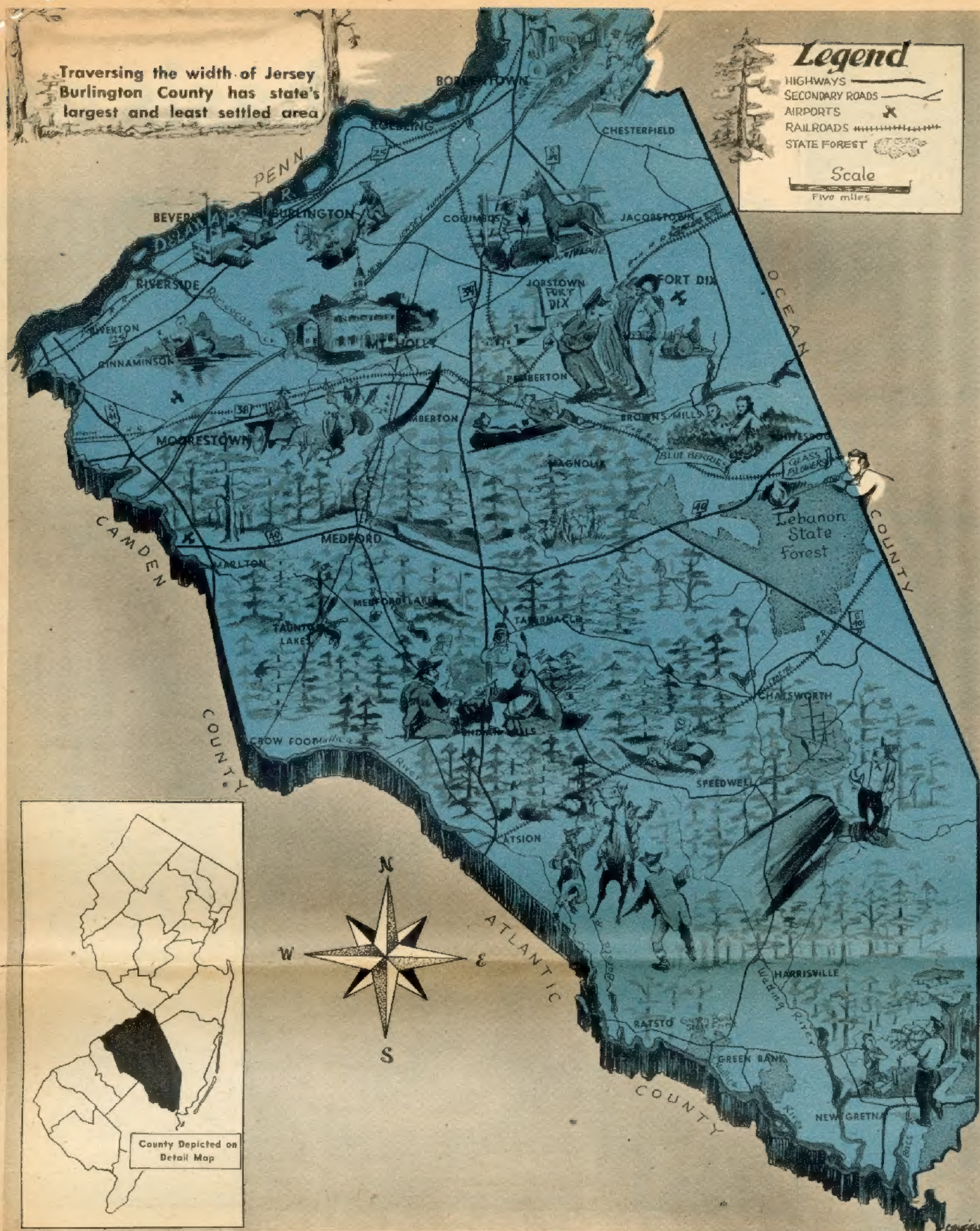
SUCH diversions as Hezekiah B. Smith to the contrary, however, concern over the pine land continued. The bog iron mining industry collapsed before the Civil War. Glass works prospered for a time at such places as Lebanon and Herman, but they were gone by 1870. A paper mill started at Harrisville reached its peak in the 1880s, only to fold in 1892.

Lumbermen and charcoal burners found wealth of varying proportions in the Pines, but they combined their businesses with a wanton disregard for the facts of forest life. They cut and burned and they failed to realize that their actions and the horrendous forest fires which raged freely and frequently were dooming the great white cedars. Soon the cedars were no more and the straggling pine and scrub oak growth which replaced them was incapable of sustaining any sizable enterprise.

Nature lent a hand at this point by



Burlington's Pine Belt viewed from fire tower on S-40. Bend in road marks Ocean County line and to the right is emergency landing field.



Pineys were drawn from the forests to work in constructing Fort Dix in World War I and rebuilding it in World War II. Many of them have found work on the state highways cutting through the forests. They work as guides, as skilled forest hands in the state forests at Lebanon, Green Bank and Bass River and as workers in the cranberry bogs. Significantly, during World War II Selective Service found few shirkers among the Pineys—and if ever there was a spot to dodge the draft it's the Pines.

The pinelands continue a problem in present-day Burlington County, nonetheless. Only about one-tenth of the county's population lives in the great stretch of land covering more than two-thirds of the county. Ownership of much land is unknown and taxes have been unpaid for years on many properties. The sprawling estate built up by Joseph Wharton in 1876 occupies tens of thousands of acres, where the state would like to establish a state forest and potable water supply.

ELSEWHERE in Burlington there is the good life. New industries are spreading along the Delaware River front in the continuing migration of manufacturers to the lower Delaware. Burlington's agricultural production remains high—with 17 per cent of all New Jersey farm acreage within the county. Burlington grows one-third of all sweet corn produced in the state, ranks first in blueberry and cranberry production and has more than a half-million peach and apple trees. Its tomato, potato and truck garden farms yield heavily and its chickens and cows each year rank in production among the top three or four counties in New Jersey. No question about Burlington's agricultural prosperity; it stands among the nation's first 10 counties in agricultural income.

Burlington is modern and growing (population up from 97,013 in 1940 to 135,910 in 1950), and the New Jersey Turnpike will speed its growth. Yet, in towns like Bordentown and Burlington and Mount Holly, much of the past remains preserved in the old buildings, in the spirit and in the traditions. It comes as no surprise, for example, that the West Jersey Proprietors still continue to meet in Burlington every April 13 to conduct business. It seems fitting and natural that Mount Holly's 200-year-old Fire Department should be the nation's oldest.

Out in the pines, few people stop—yet who can deny the hint of excitement in the sandy roads leading through the forests, possibly to a ghost town in the underbrush? Or who would deny the beauty of the white birches and the colorful laurel intermingling with the pines and scrub oaks? Nature, at least, knows there's a future in the Pines.

beckoning men to cultivate the wild cranberry bogs in the forests. By the middle '80s the Pines were producing half the nation's crop (and today only Wisconsin and Massachusetts grow more cranberries than Jersey's pine bogs). It remained for Miss Elizabeth C. White, daughter of one of Burlington's earliest cranberry growers, to awaken the county to the potentialities of cultivating swamp huckleberries. Still alive today at Whitesbog, Miss White ranks as one of the nation's foremost blueberry pioneers.

POPULATION has been declining in the Pines for years. Dr. John W. Harshberger in his "Vegetation of the New Jersey Pine Barrens" called the area in 1916 "one of the wildest, most desolate portions of the United States." He told of traveling as far as 10 miles without seeing so much as a house, much less a human. He pointed out that the sparse population had contributed to the county some of the nation's most personalized locale names—Mt. Misery, Ong's Hat, Mary Ann Forge, Bozarthtown, Martha Forge, Apple Pie Hill—highly suggestive of the people who had passed through or had stopped and had been remembered. Above all, Dr. Harshberger definitely called attention to the

unique and diversified flowers, trees and plants thriving in the so-called "Barrens."

Just before World War I Miss Elizabeth C. Kite, a social worker from the Vineland Training School, startled the state with a report on sordid conditions in the woodlands. She told of illiterates living in squalor, of people like "The Squire"—who elected himself "the law" and for a flat fee of 50 cents "gave writin's" ranging from a marriage license to a "divorce writin'." Miss Kite claimed the worst conditions in the Pines were in Burlington County, and a direct result of her work was the establishment in 1916 at New Lisbon of Four Mile Colony for the mentally retarded.

Miss Kite traced the origins of the Pineys (a name given pineland inhabitants) back to the "Pine Robbers" of Revolutionary War times. They were joined through the years by Tories, by Hessian deserters, by people who sought religious freedom or who desired just plain independence. There were disreputable people, of course, but mainly the Pineys sought merely to be left alone. Unfortunately that desire, not unpraiseworthy in itself, also included a lack of responsibility toward others—which meant that schools weren't built, roads weren't

maintained and man was a law only unto himself.

ARGUMENTS about the merits and faults of the Pineys have raged throughout the years ever since Miss Kite's report. Authorities concede today that the people of the Pines are (and always have been) more shy and reticent than mean. Many of the



Constructed in World War I and rebuilt in World War II, the still-growing Fort Dix Reservation has provided work for the Pine people.